The Comanches

197 and read it back. They can talk our language, but they just don't want to!" The Comanche language became the lingua franca of the South Plains, and at Indian gatherings the proceedings usually took place through the medium of the Comanche tongue. This may explain why the Comanches were reported not to be so proficient in the use of the sign language as the other Plains tribes.

619 "Tribe" when applied to the Comanches is a word of sociological but not political significance. The Comanches had a strong consciousness of kind. A Comanche, whatever his band, was a Comanche. He could say, "I am of the *Nɔmɔnɔ: I am of The People*. By dress, by speech, by thoughts and actions the Comanches held a common bond of identity and affinity that set them off from all other Indians—from all the rest of the world. In this sense, the tribe had meaning. The tribe consisted of a people who had a common way of life. But that way of life did not include political institutions or social mechanisms by which they could act as a tribal unit. There was, in the old days, no ceremonial occasion or economic enterprise that pulled all the far-flung bands together for a spell, be it ever so brief. There was no chieftain or group of chieftains to act for the tribe as a whole. There was no tribal council.

The first time the bands with all their men, women, and children came together was in the dying moments of the old, free culture at the time of the first Comanche Sun Dance in 1874.

621 The Comanches were organized in family groups and bands.
361 The bands were autonomous units, each loosely organized and each centering its activities in a vaguely defined territory within the Comanche country. But, on the other hand, there were no distinct boundaries between the several band territories, and any Comanche or family was free and welcome to settle, or hunt, or move through the regions of other bands, whatever his own affiliation might be. Although warriors of the Wasp band joined with the United States Army as scouts in the final campaigns against their kinsmen, Comanche bands never warred with each other, but rather co-operated on the friendliest terms whenever happenstance drew them together.

621 The Comanche band was strikingly similar in organization to the aboriginal Shoshonean groups of the Great Basin in the days preceding white contact. It ranged in size from a single family camping

11: Casagrande E,L-S (1940) 1954
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

192 words.[84] With an efficient means of word-
197 building at hand, Comanche had little need
[121] to resort to linguistic borrowing. Also, the absence of writing and a literary or scholarly tradition in Comanche seems to have acted as a further deterrent to borrowing.[85]

121 Nor, although they are difficult to assess,
197 can such factors as speech fashions and the efforts of native language purists be ignored.
197 There is evidence that the Comanche pos-
195 sessed considerable pride of tongue. Richardson refers to Comanche as the court language of the South Plains,[86] and, indeed, it is difficult to imagine the Comanche condescending to use the language of a lesser
198 people. Moreover, the sign language was available as a lingua franca and was widely used among the Plains tribes.

121 Even if a language does undergo wholesale changes these are mostly in vocabulary and not in phonetic form or grammar where a more pedestrian drift seems to characterize linguistic changes. When contacts reach a certain intensity and duration, and as the social and psychological pressure of the dominant language increases, there is a tendency to adopt the language of the dominant culture rather than to patch up the old language to serve.[87]

4.5. Loanwords have received a fair share of attention from linguists,[88] and they

[84] Edward Sapir, Language, pp. 208-10 (New York, 1921).

[113] [85] By contrast, cp. Hausa, in Joseph H. Greenberg, Arabic Loan-Words in Hausa, Word 3: 85-97 (1947).

[86] R. N. Richardson, The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement, p. 23 (Glendale, California; 1933).

[87] Edward Sapir, Language, p. 220 (New York, 1921).

[113] [88] For example, Myles Dillon, Linguistic Borrowing and Historical Evidence, Lg 21: 12-17 (1945); Robert A. Hall, Jr., English Loan-Words in Micronesian Languages, Lg 21: 214-219 (1945); Einar Haugen, Phonological Shifting in American Norwegian, Lg 14: 112-120 (1938); M. J. Herskovits, On the Provenience of the Portuguese in Saramacca Tongo, de West-Indische Gids, 13: 545-559 (1930); K. H. Menges, Altaic Loanwords in

[p. 228-A]

192 552 kaiwanĭ· *Kiowa* (-nĭ· may be translated as *people*); karó· *Caddo;* cikšó·nĭ· *Chickasaw;* sikapo? *Kickapoo;* siminó·? *Seminole;* so-soni? *Shoshone;* navó· *Navaho;* yu·ta? *Ute, Paiute.*

In contrast to the above a number of tribal names are descriptive: ?a?a·nĭ· *Crow (horned people);* ?esikwita? *Mescalero Apache (grey feces);* papicimina? *Sioux (head unjointed);* ta·si?nĭ· *Kiowa-Apache (spotted people* (from small-pox); saritihka? *Arapaho (dog eaters);* šianavo· *Cheyenne (feather striped* from their arrows).

197 648 Early and brief French contacts have left no apparent trace on Comanche. And in spite of the wide and relatively frequent relations, both friendly and hostile, between the Comanche and other tribes of the Plains and the Southwest, only a few loanwords from other American Indian languages seem to have been taken into Comanche, and those noted are of doubtful origin. This may in part be attributed to the wide-spread use of the sign language and to what seems to have been a rather large amount of multilingualism among the Plains tribes.[99]

197 198 197 It seems especially noteworthy that the Kiowa, who lived in close association with the Comanche since the close of the 18th century,[100] had so little direct effect on the Comanche language. One word, ?aho *thank you,* seems to have been borrowed from Kiowa.

[192]

601 192 197 The kinship term, haipia, which refers to siblings-in-law of the opposite sex between whom the typical Plains reciprocal joking relationship obtained may, as Gladwin suggests,[101] have been borrowed along with

[99] James Mooney, Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, 17th Annual Report, BAE p. 156 (Washington, D. C.; 1898), mentions that Kiowa children were often left with the Crow for 2-3 years to learn the language and thus preserve old friendships.

[100] James Mooney, Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, 17th Annual Report, BAE p. 163 (Washington, D. C.; 1898).

[113] [101] Thomas Gladwin, Comanche Kin Behavior, AA 50: 73-94, p. 81 (1948).

[p. 231-A]

11: Casagrande E,L-5 (1940) 1954
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

191
195
[177]

sense of propriety and prudishness, and there has been a direct extension of English word taboos to the native speech which is unashamed and forthright. However, one interpreter who was a devout Christian was an exception. He had little hesitation in supplying or using a sexual vocabulary in Comanche yet was extremely embarrassed at uttering the vulgar English equivalents.

A new euphemistic descriptive word for *feces* or *urine*, na?ro?ipĭ (na-, reflexive + to?i *come out*, + -pĭ, nominalizer), which can be translated as *waste matter*, has been substituted for the old word for *feces*, kwitapĭ, both in compounds such as the words for toilet-paper, toilet or chamber pot and also when it occurs alone. One of the older men laughed when asked about the word, but granted its position in the language. A milder word for *cheese*, kihtavicipĭ, *hard milk*, or the English loanword, ci·s, is usually heard in place of ko?avicipĭ *groin milk*, or ko?akwana? *groin smell*. Similarly, the coarse or obscene meanings of many Comanche personal names are frequently disguised by slight alterations in form. A comparable effect has been noted in Muskogee: "Certain Muskogee words are avoided when white people are around because they contain syllables that might be mistaken for some of the English "four-letter" words".[141] To the writer's knowledge the same thing is not found in Comanche, probably because the phonetics of the language aren't quite as likely to give rise to such interpretations.

[551]

198

Finally, we may ask why no pidgin or creolized version of Spanish or English arose among the Comanche or, in fact, among other North American Indian tribes, since these marginal languages are so prevalent in other parts of the world.[142] The answer, albeit briefly and inadequately

[141] Mary R. Haas, personal communication.

[142] See John E. Reinecke, Marginal Languages —A Sociological Study of the Creole Languages and Trade Jargons. Ph.D. dissertation (Yale University, New Haven; 1937).

(113)

[p. 242-B]

11: Casagrande E,L-5 (1940) 1954
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

198 stated, is probably that the conditions under which these forms of speech flourish were absent. A relatively stabilized tangential relationship between a dominant and subordinate people as between master and slave or servant, missionary and convert, or trader and native seems necessary for the formation of a pidgin or creolized language. Such a relationship never held between the Comanche and Whites for any length of time and no true pidgin ever developed.

197 Comanche is a dying language. It is being steadily eclipsed by English which today has a new and relentless prestige. Another 50 to 75 years may see Comanche cease to function as a living language. The constant contact with Whites, the teaching of English in the schools and, due to the fact that the Comanche live on scattered allotments, the lack of an integrated community or tribal life comparable to that of the Pueblo or Reservation tribes, are all factors in the evanescence of the language. English is the language of the dominant culture, the language through which one gets on in the world by means of widening social, economic and political contacts. Though it is doomed, the language is far and away the most vitally functioning part that remains of the old Comanche culture. Other traits are gone, empty and broken forms, or compromises with the new. Comanche today affords ample evidence of the flexibility and tenacity of language in the face of pressure from a dominant culture.

121 6.0. Personal names, along with kinship terminology,[10] represent a segment of culture where custom and language are virtually inseparable, and it seems especially appropriate in a study of linguistic acculturation to describe the effects of contacts with Western culture on Comanche personal names. To provide a basis for comparison between the old and new practices,

[10] Thomas Gladwin, Comanche Kin Behavior, AA 50: 73-94 (1948) discusses Comanche kinship terms.

[p. 243-A]

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

883 177 ingly remembered none of the white man's ways. And they seemed to have forgotten the old tribal ways as well.

[291] In my thinking, I found it convenient to put the women and girls 562 191 in yet another group. One of the first things I learned was the taboo which prevented women and girls from talking to men, Indians or white, other than their own menfolks, excepting on the most necessary [123] occasions. Because of this I never addressed them unless they spoke to me.

124 [122] I was consciously making every effort to learn as much of the language as I could, and in time I was able to catch on quickly to what the men were talking about and to follow their conversation. [198] But the women seemed to have a vocabulary of their own. I would often listen to a group of women talking in the store, or out in the camp, but I could distinguish only an occasional word.

657 871 Those who conceived of educating the Indian youths also conceived the idea that the educating must be done in faraway places, and little has been done through the years to change the practice. [171] Even as I type this article, several hundred Indian children from New Mexico, Arizona, and other western states are attending Chilocco Indian School in northern Oklahoma.

657 871 177 While in Carlisle or other Indian boarding schools, Indian children had slept in clean beds with sheets changed every week. They had sat in chairs at a table with a clean tablecloth and had eaten food served from clean dishes. They had been taught the use of the knife, fork, 178 and spoon. But when the Indian boy arrived home for good, he had only his parents' camp to go to. Though the Comanche families were living on their allotments, they continued to live a camp life, much the same as they had lived the previous twenty-five years as Reservation Indians.

352 264 In this camp our Carlisle graduate sat on the ground, or a log, or a goods box. He ate his food from a pie tin and was served directly from the kettle in which the food had been cooked. If a boy was lucky, he had a fork and spoon to go along with his pocketknife as eating utensils.

513 [342] Spring, summer, and fall they all slept in the brush arbor on platforms and under seldom-washed cotton blankets. When the northers became blue and came with regularity, they slept in conventional tents, either on the ground or on low platforms constructed with 342 poles. Once in a while, as I rode on my collection trips, I would see a

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

595 462 went about her tasks cheerfully and willingly. Whichever one of the women divided the labor reserved enough for herself so that she was just as busy as the other women.

857 462 The little girls of the family stayed close to the women the day through, and performed tasks suitable for their ages. But the little boys roamed far and wide, never seeming to have any duties except when they were helping their father with the horses.

521 522 462 [296] [124] During group tasks there was always quite a bit of conversation and considerable laughing. In warm weather the women would go to the creek together, select a place in the shade where the water was about six or eight inches deep, and sit in the water on the sandy bottom to do the family wash. I never learned what the talk and laughter were about, as I was never able to accumulate a squaw vocabulary.

521 562 609 124 [198] (Comanche women held only the most necessary conversation with any man, Indian or white, other than their own menfolks. And while I was generally able to figure out the subject of the men's conversation and follow its progress, I seldom recognized a word used by the women when they conversed among themselves. At times I was inclined to think they even had a different language.)

595 The same air of camaraderie seemed to prevail whenever the wives were together in a group. I noticed it in the store whenever there was only one family present. Their trading done, the wives would draw 516 [352] their chairs into a group and converse. They never had chairs in their camps, but the women never passed up the several chairs we had in the store—although once in a while some quite old squaw would insist on sitting on the floor. If the chairs were all occupied, the women never hesitated to sit on the floor, and the people trading would walk around them.

595 Wherever you saw a man's wives—in town, on the reservation, or at a celebration—they always formed a group. You would not find one wife in a store and another out on the street. Two or more groups of wives would often chat together in the store or sit together in the shade on the reservation or at a powwow.

595 422 294 One custom which seemed odd to me was that of each wife's having her own sewing machine. The sewing done by the average family was not so extensive that one machine would not easily have sufficed. Yet each wife would have her own—something I had been alerted to look for by an article that had appeared in the *Star* commenting that each of Quanah Parker's wives had her individual sewing machine.

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

000 to the plant. Should you actually take hold, the tiny spines on the top of each nodule would get you, while if you passed your hand too closely, some of the interlaced spines would be so placed that they would bite. All in all, it was a well-protected cactus, but not a menacing one.

I don't recall how many years Mother kept the cactus sitting on the little knee-high deck built even with the bottom of the window, 609 and I remember but one casualty. One afternoon Mother was helping 432 in the store and waiting on three Indian women. They were the multiple wives of a Comanche living in our trade territory, and were regular store customers.

Mother and Dad made no effort to learn any Comanche, and they much preferred to have me wait on the Indian trade. At the time, I was busy on the grocery side of the store, but I was keeping an eye on her efforts to wait on the three Comanche women. We kept a number of yardsticks on each counter, so that an Indian could point to what he wanted when we didn't understand him. By custom, 609 each wife bought for herself and her children, paying for each article 432 595 as she bought it. When it came Wife Number Three's turn, Mother began having trouble.

She was the youngest of the three, and would have been the homeliest even if she hadn't lost one of her eyes. Through one of the mysteries of the world of genes, her one child, a little girl about three, was a beauty by anyone's standards. The other wives of a family always had fun with the wife who was buying. They were apparently offering free advice that was neither sought nor appreciated. They bantered back and forth, but I never knew what was being said. [198] As far as I was able to tell, the Indian women spoke a language of [124] their own—at least they had a different vocabulary. I was soon able to follow the men when they talked, but as it was generally expressed, "No savvy squaw talk."

I was sure Number Three was trying deliberately to be difficult. Maybe she was only trying to show off for the other two wives and for some Comanche women sitting in chairs back by the stove. We never took the stove down when spring came, as there was no suitable place to store it. It took up less space in place than elsewhere. Number Three continually refused to use the yardstick Mother tried to hand her, and by motions insisted Mother lay more bolts of calico on the counter.

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

In about a year the Rock Island Railroad came, and they wanted to build only one bridge instead of two. So, only a few feet below Ca-vo-yo's ford, they built a bridge to take their track across Cache Creek. More years passed, and now a splendid highway bridge spans the creek, just below the spot where the now discarded railroad bridge's sawed-off piling marks its once useful evistence. Ca-vo-yo's little T-shaped house also remains.

I was courting my first sweetheart when the ford went into use. Her people lived about two and a half miles east of Ca-vo-yo's house, and our town was about two and a half miles northwest of the ford. The Girl and I used his ford many times. We each had a good riding horse, and often we were horseback. Then by diligence I rated a buggy. (It didn't have a top, but we didn't mind; we were in love.) Ca-vo-yo didn't have an arbor, and if the weather was at all clement, he and his woman would be sitting on the east porch when we went by. We would smile and wave gaily to the old Indian and his woman, and they would return our smiles and our waves. With slight variations this scene was repeated many times.

One Sunday afternoon, following an afternoon church service, we were returning to her parents' home. While I held the lower gate open for the Girl to drive the buggy through, I saw Ca-vo-yo come out, open the upper gate, and lay it back. Knowing he wanted to talk, when I drew even with him I stopped the horse. Smiling his widest smile, the old fellow approached the buggy and by the means of signs and the use of one word asked, "Is she your wife (squaw)?" Apparently he and his woman were becoming curious, since they didn't understand white man's courting. Probably, to them, we were wasting a lot of time.

When you try to describe the sign language (*maw-ta-quoip* or hand talk), it sounds jerky and disconnected. Instead it had a natural grace and flow, like unhurried water making its way over a well-worn course. The old Indian extended his right fist, closed loosely, knuckles up, in front of us. Quickly extending his forefinger toward the Girl, and as quickly closing the finger back, he extended the thumb pointing to my chest. Then he said the word "squaw" as a question—literally, "She your squaw?"

I didn't look toward the Girl. I am sure she was blushing, as I know I was. I finally managed to shake my head and stammer out a "No," as I drove away. In due time the Girl and I managed to resume

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

many of the Indians from gambling when they had money. But as long as blackjack and three-card monte were dealt by Indians, the money remained in the tribe.

The camp-out on the reservation was dear to the older Indians' hearts. It was a reminder of the wild tribal days after the late summer buffalo hunt—the feasting, visiting, storytelling, gambling, and horse racing. There was no buffalo meat; but they had learned to eat beef, and there was plenty of money to buy it. Likewise, they could indulge in other goodies they had acquired a taste for—and the whiskey peddler came with the darkness each evening.

Mostly the visitors came from faraway tribes—people who didn't have Grass Money payments. They seemed to be old fellows, warrior age. Here, there, and yonder, you would see two old fellows squatted or sitting with their backs against blackjack trees, facing each other and visiting in the sign language. You were sure they were reriding the old war trails.

There was another string to the licensed trader's fiddle. Once an Indian failed to pay his bill to an independent trader, his credit with that merchant was gone. When out of money, he had to trade with the licensed trader. These traders' prices ran a great deal higher, and most Indians wanted to keep out of their clutches.

I got over my scare once the store's money was safe in the bank, and I rode back to the reservation. My memory is that I had seen about all of the Indians owing large accounts, and I had only the odds and ends to clean up. I never saw the marshal again that afternoon. I rode in home, eighteen miles, that night, starting after dark. Perhaps I should add that most adults with sense, large merchants from Lawton and surrounding towns, and the moneylenders set up camp in the section line outside the reservation gate. There they could catch the Indians going and coming.

Some readers may read a different meaning into the word *reservation* than I have in mind in this story. I use it here in the sense of land held back, reserved from allotment and homesteading, when the area was opened for settlement in 1901. There were three of these tracts, containing two or three sections each. One was at Fort Sill, one at Anadarko, and one just southwest of Cache. There was a licensed trading store on each tract, and the land was the property of the Indians. Reservation was the name in general use for these areas. The